

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

HURRICANE KATRINA VETERANS AND FAMILIES QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (from www.va.gov)

How do I find out about the condition of a family member who is a patient at a VA medical center in the affected area? *At this time, that information is not available. Please be assured, however, that we are taking the best possible care of our patients, even at this difficult time.*

I need to contact a family member who works at a VA medical center in the affected area. How can I do so? *Unfortunately, we do not have any available methods to assist you if you need to contact an individual employee at this time. Our best suggestion is that you use any communications methods at your own disposal. All VA employees who were working at all our facilities at the time of the hurricane are currently safe and well.*

What is the current status of VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina? *The New Orleans VAMC has lost power, and patients are being evacuated to VAMCs in Houston, Jackson, Shreveport and Alexandria, LA. The Medical Center's Staff will be evacuated once the patients have been evacuated. The Biloxi VAMC is open, but it sustained significant damage from downed trees and broken windows. The Gulfport VAMC is completely closed. All patients have been evacuated.*

What is the status of VA outpatient clinics in the hurricane area? *All VA clinics along the Gulf coast, from Louisiana to Florida, are closed. Information about backup clinics will be released soon.*

Will mobile clinics be available for veterans? *The first mobile facilities will be delivered September 1 to the Biloxi VAMC.*

I am a VA patient. I need a prescription refilled. What should I do? *Call the nearest open VA medical center, tell them your prescription needs and explain that you are unable to get a refill prescription because of the hurricane. Also, in order to receive care, you will need to register at the new VAMC.*

What if I ordered a prescription, but the post office can't deliver it because my home is damaged? *Contact the nearest open post office with your forwarding address. Local post offices are holding packages for up to 14 days for addresses affected by the hurricane. Also, inform both the nearest open post office and nearest open VAMC of your new or temporary address.*

Are drugs that I had with me during the flood safe to use? *Discard drugs – even those in their original containers – if they came in contact with flood or contaminated water. Contamination may lead to diseases that can cause serious health effects.*

I am a veteran who experienced the trauma of Hurricane Katrina. I am shaken by the loss and devastation and would like to talk with someone about dealing with this event. Where can I call for help? *Call the nearest open VA medical center. Counselors are available to help you through the trauma.*

Who can I call about my compensation or pension benefit checks? *Call 1-800-827-1000. Someone will be able to help you.*

VA EVACUATES PATIENTS FROM HURRICANE AREA
(VA News Release September 2, 2005) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has successfully evacuated the most critically ill patients from the VA medical center in New Orleans. Ten inpatients on ventilators at the New Orleans VAMC were evacuated to the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, La. before being transported to other medical centers in the region. Ninety eight additional patients were successfully evacuated Thursday using a VA truck convoy and flown via Air National Guard C-130s to Houston, Texas, Jackson, Mississippi, and Alexandria, Louisiana. Evacuation of the remaining 94 patients in VA's New Orleans facility, along with 367 staff and family members, continued into the night Thursday and on Friday, and will continue until all have been safely relocated. The evacuation of other patients, staff and family members continued Friday as the Department responds to Hurricane Katrina. Information

about patients evacuated from the VA medical centers in New Orleans and Gulfport can be obtained toll-free at 1-800-507-4571.

The VA medical centers in New Orleans and Gulfport, Mississippi, both sustained major storm damage. The Gulfport facility has been closed and the one in New Orleans will be closed after the last patients have been transferred. Inpatients formerly at the Gulfport VA Medical Center were transferred before the hurricane struck to other VA medical centers.

VA officials are establishing procedures for family members to locate inpatients evacuated from the affected facilities. Officials are also finalizing procedures for veterans from the hurricane area to receive benefits checks and prescription drugs, and to ensure that VA employees continue to be paid.

NEW HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION FOR SURVIVING

SPOUSES Florida Statute 196.24 provides a Property Tax exemption of \$5000 to any ex-service member who is a bona fide resident of the state, who was discharged under honorable conditions, and who has a service-connected disability of 10 percent or more.

Effective July 1, 2005 Florida Senate Bill 550 extended this exemption to the unremarried surviving spouse of such a disabled ex-service member who, on the date of the disabled ex-service member's death, had been married to the disabled ex-service member for at least 5 years.

The production of a certificate of disability from the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) before the property appraiser of the county wherein the surviving spouse's property lies is prima facie evidence of the fact that he or she is entitled to the exemption. The certificate of disability may be obtained by calling the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office at 1-800-827-1000.

NEW STUDY SHOWS WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE

SIMILAR TO MEN'S AT VA (VA News Release August 8, 2005) WASHINGTON - Men and women receive remarkably similar outpatient care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), according to a study published in the Journal of General Internal Medicine. The study looked at nine measures of quality care that are equally appropriate for women and men to determine what percentage of VA patients received appropriate care for their gender. Men were more likely to receive appropriate services in five of the nine categories; women in the other four.

IMPORTANT DATES IN SEPTEMBER

September 1 payments for August due

September 5 Federal holiday - Labor Day

September 8 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 09-30-2005 payments

September 19 last day to change or cancelled direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 09-30-2005 payments

September 30 payments for September due

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -

PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility)

PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120

1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **<http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/>**

Property Management **www.ocwen.com**

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs: **www.floridavets.org/**

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**

